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Monday, October 08, 2007

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## Keep Michigan interior designers free

Dick Carpenter and John Ross

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For the nearly 10 years Pamela Schindlbeck has run her own interior design business in Manistee, she has demonstrated the entrepreneurial spirit this country was founded on. Her example to other entrepreneurs -- earning an honest living by pleasing customers -- should be applauded. Instead, a bill is creeping its way through the Michigan Legislature that would threaten her very livelihood.

House Bill 4772 would force all interior designers to obtain a license from the government before they could practice interior design, or even call themselves "interior designers." The small group of interior designers pushing the bill (for the third time) seeks to create a cartel. That is, they want to establish government-imposed barriers to entry into the industry to limit competition.

The proponents of the bill, led by the Council for Interior Design Registration, argue this licensing scheme will protect public health, safety and welfare. Apparently, the unlicensed practice of interior design is a threat to the public.

The council has yet, however, to produce a scintilla of evidence to support this claim. Indeed, state agencies in Colorado, Georgia, South Carolina and Washington have analyzed the need for interior design licensure and found no potential for harm, according to Designing Cartels, a report on the nationwide push to license interior designers.

If the proposal is enacted into law, applicants for a license will have to pass a 13-hour exam. To even be eligible to sit for the exam, they must complete a degree or certification program in interior design and accrue thousands of hours of experience before they can legally recommend aesthetic and practical furniture arrangements and offer other interior design services.

This will effectively bar Michigan residents who cannot afford to enroll in an expensive and extended program from entering the industry. Likewise, those who have passed their college years, who work for a living and have perhaps, like Schindlbeck, started a family, will look at the exorbitant cost in time and money before they can even apply for a license and reconsider.

Schindlbeck earned an associate's degree before starting her business, and to maintain that business she must impress her customers with her talents and work ethic, not the bureaucratic

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hoops the council seeks to enshrine in law.

According to Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels, who vetoed a similar scheme last May, there is simply no need to license interior designers: "The marketplace already serves as an effective check on poor performance; designers doing inadequate work are more likely to be penalized by negative customer reaction than by a government agency trying to enforce arbitrary and subjective qualification standards."

Indeed, it should be up to interior designers what kind of certification they wish to pursue, if any -- faulty color schemes do not damage the public welfare. Nonetheless, the Michigan proposal would create a nine-member Board of Interior Design charged with implementing "arbitrary and subjective" standards. Tellingly, six members of the Board would themselves be licensed interior designers with a clear interest in limiting the number of licensees -- potential competitors -- they dole out.

Current interior designers might be grandfathered-in, though they would then face fees, unnecessary continuing education classes and other burdensome regulations. Michiganians caught providing interior design services without a license would be committing a misdemeanor punishable by fines and jail time.

This unreasonable meddling in the economy will close off employment opportunities for interior designers and limit consumer choice, which is probably why only four other states in the entire country limit the practice of interior design the way HB 4772 would. None of the other 46 states -- where anyone who wants to may practice interior design -- have experienced any problems whatsoever. Why fix what isn't broken?

The constitutional right to earn an honest living in the occupation of one's choice is a sacred American birthright. Michiganians should head off this threat to occupational freedom.

*Dick Carpenter is director of strategic research and John Ross is research associate at the Institute for Justice in Washington, D.C. ( [www.ij.org](http://www.ij.org) ). E-mail comments to [letters@detnews.com](mailto:letters@detnews.com).*

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